

THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Advisers to the Nation on Science, Engineering, and Medicine

National Academy of Sciences
National Academy of Engineering
Institute of Medicine
National Research Council

Commission on Life Sciences/Board on Biology
Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources
03/13/00

Standing Committee Biotechnology, Food and Fiber Production, and the Environment

The use of modern biotechnology in agriculture has emerged as a potential tool for improving agricultural processes, products, food, and the environment. Along with this promise, concerns about the environmental and human health consequences of transgenic products in agriculture have been raised. The public debate has centered around the potential benefits and risks of the application of transgenic methods to agriculture, the oversight of the products, and their control and distribution. Specific issues depend on the product, its use, and its environment.

The National Research Council's Board on Biology and Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources have convened a standing committee that will help identify emerging issues in the broad areas of agricultural biotechnology. The Standing Committee on Biotechnology, Food and Fiber Production, and the Environment will review and discuss scientific guidance for issues surrounding biotechnology as it is applied to food and fiber production and the environment. The group will respond to important concerns in a timely fashion by helping to design projects focusing on specific issues. The standing committee will not author consensus studies, but will recommend NRC panels to do so and bring in outside expertise as needed.

Project Scope:

The Standing Committee on Biotechnology, Food and Fiber Production, and the Environment will maintain surveillance of scientific issues in the areas of plant, animal, and microorganism biotechnology used in food and fiber production and in other emerging applications. The committee will address applications of biotechnology as they relate to food and fiber production, agriculture, and the environment, including diverse applications of biotechnology in areas such as bioremediation, as well as current and future public policy issues. The committee will respond to requests from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other potential sponsors. The committee will assume responsibility for (1) responding to requests and identifying appropriate mechanisms such as consensus studies, workshops, or other activities to address the requests; (2) identifying emerging scientific issues and setting priorities for studies or other activities that should be undertaken by the National Academies; and (3) helping to organize and oversee ad hoc study projects performed by panels to provide independent analyses of scientific information and approaches to federal evaluation of the products of biotechnology as they affect agriculture, food production, and the environment. The committee will draw upon expertise from other relevant units within the National Academies, such as the Institute of Medicine's Food and Nutrition Board and other experts as needed.

Upcoming Events and Information:

The first committee meeting will be held May 4 through May 5, 2000. In the very near future, the NRC will announce a panel to review of the scientific approaches being used by USDA to decide when to allow the unregulated release of genetically modified plants. In July, the standing committee expects to host workshops on approaches to monitoring health and the environment to add assurances that any problems with genetically modified crops would be rapidly detected. For further information about the committee and its activities, please contact Dr. Jennifer Kuzma (202-334-2074) or see the project website at <http://www4.nationalacademies.org/cp.nsf> and search by project title "Biotechnology, Food and Fiber Production, and the Environment." Major activities of the standing committee will also be posted and announced on this website, as the specific projects develop.